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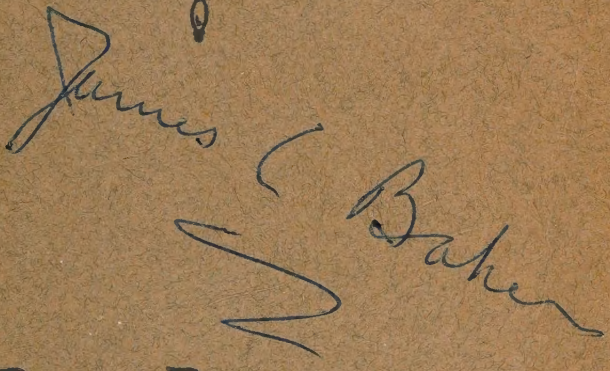

Percy Dearmer

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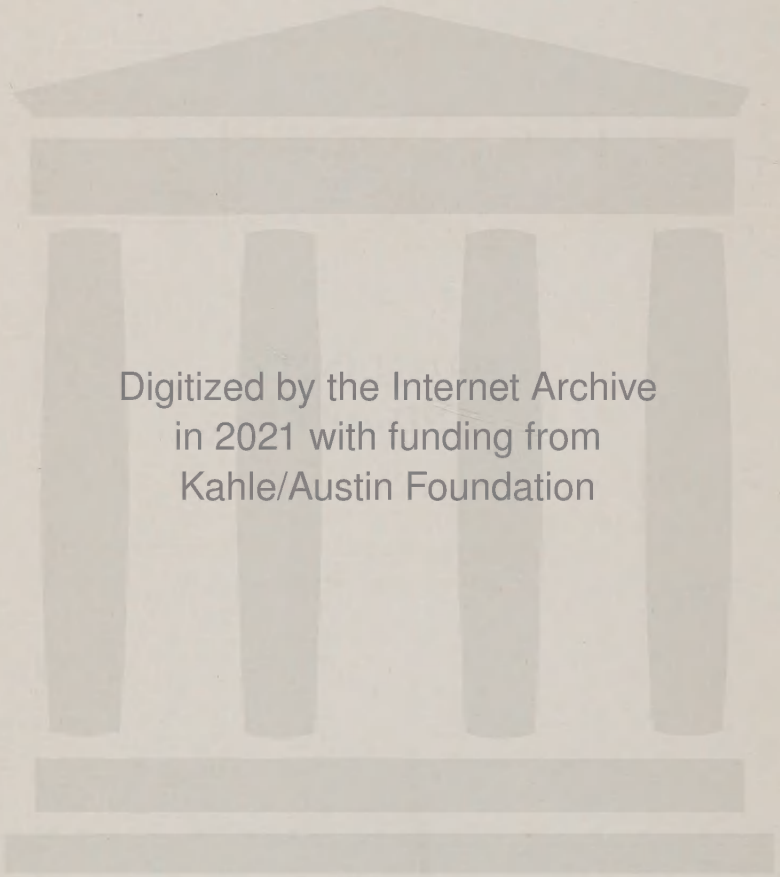
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Christianity and Art

By Percy Dearmer

THE prevalent confusion on the subject of art is due not only to the lack of a simple philosophy of æsthetic, but also to a long-established historical mistake. It has been generally supposed that the religion of Christendom was fundamentally opposed to art, and that the Church had only taken art up as a plaything and a tool during a period, vaguely known as the Middle Ages, when her true character had been destroyed by corruption and superstition. Consequently the general notion among pious folk in the nineteenth century was that art was rather wrong, while the poets and artists of Europe generally considered that religion was rather stupid. On the one hand, even Ruskin, writing in 1851, said that he had "never yet met with a Christian whose heart was thoroughly set upon the world to come, and, so far as human judgment could pronounce, perfect and right before God, who cared about art at all."[1] The distrust passed away as the century drew towards its close; but to-day the religious world still looks upon art as a kind of furbelow, pleasurable and inexpensive, upon the real business of life—a view with which the

[1] *Stones of Venice*, 4th edition, 1886, vol. ii, p. 103. But Ruskin was only thirty-two when he wrote this, and it was doubtless true enough of the "religious world" in 1851.

business world cordially agrees, patronizing art with such gross maladroitness that the artist is more contemptuous than ever.

Shelley and Keats prophesied about beauty, with a new grasp of its intellectual content, at the time when the eclipse of the nineteenth century was beginning to cast its shadow over the architecture of the world. They showed their contempt for the official religion of their day by ignoring it. To them beauty was Greece, and art was something which had expired with the Roman Empire—as when Shelley, for instance, found nothing to look at in Ravenna but its classical remains. There followed a period when Christianity was supposed to have been the consistent enemy throughout of all beauty and joy. Swinburne [1] was but summing up a contemporary verdict of French literature when he put into the mouth of a Roman of the Constantinian age the words:—

> " Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath;
>
> We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death . . .
>
> O lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings of rocks and soils!
>
> O ghastly stories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted gods!"

The contemporary French literature is full of the same idea: men assumed Christianity to be what the pictures and images of French churches proclaimed it. Mediæval monasticism and clericalism had indeed adopted an ascetic view of life, which was intensified by the Counter-Reformation and has overlaid the beauty of Continental churches with a morbid Puritanism more profound than anything to be found among Protestants. To men like Théophile Gautier, Christianity appeared as the enemy of that beauty which paganism was supposed to proclaim: "O vieux monde," he

[1] Hymn to Proserpine, *Poems and Ballads*, First Series.

wrote in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, "tout ce que tu as révéré est donc méprisé! . . . De maigres anchorites . . . de martyrs tout sanglants . . . se sont juchés sur les piédestaux de tes dieux si beaux et si charmants. . . . Le Christ a enveloppé le monde dans son linceul . . . Virginité, plante amère, née sur un sol trempé de sang . . . le monde antique ne te connaissait pas, fleur inféconde! . . . Virginité, mysticisme, mélancholie, trois maladies nouvelles apportées par le Christ."[1]

John Addington Symonds [2] in his study of the Renaissance, which admirably sums up the opinion of his day, is obsessed with the same idea. Art to him is necessarily "sensuous," and Christianity ascetic; therefore every great artist, even a Giovanni Pisano or a Cimabue, has somehow to be dragged into the category of paganism and included in the Renaissance, with the remarkable historical result that "no true form of figurative art intervened between Greek sculpture and Italian painting" of the Renaissance.

Symonds indeed is an excellent representation of his age. He is torn between art and religion: both, he feels, are right; but he cannot reconcile them. He is "pagan" enough to appreciate the delight in things of beauty for their own sake; but he is still Puritan enough to be distrustful of plastic art and to use the word "sensuous" in two senses, ignoring the sacramental reconciliation between sense-form and spiritual idea which Hegel had taught, and which, after all, has been part of the philosophy of religion throughout the Christian era. He concludes his first chapter by saying that our deepest thoughts about the world and God cannot be personified by any æsthetic process, and therefore could never enter "that atmosphere wherein alone they could

[1] Page 211 in the ordinary edition.

[2] *The Renaissance in Italy:* "The Fine Arts," 2nd edition, 1882, pp. 8, 13–39, etc.

become through fine art luminous." The divinity in them "is a deity that refuses the investitute of form."

To this we can only say that art exists precisely to make our highest thoughts more "luminous"; and that, as a matter of plain history, Christianity has from the beginning demanded the investiture of form for its ideas, and, in Europe, of the human form.

It is significant that hardly anything was put forward from the theological side to meet these abundant misunderstandings. Westcott was perhaps the only theologian of importance who attempted to state a Christian philosophy of art, and this he only threw out in the form of an appendix, buried from the eyes of ordinary mortals in a work of Greek exegesis.[1] It is perhaps also significant that a writer so little in sympathy with the ecclesiological movement of his day should have got further than anyone else into the heart of the matter, as when he said that the object of art is "to present the truth of things under the aspect of beauty," that Christianity is "a transfiguration of all human powers by the revelation of their divine connexions and destiny," and that Christian art is "the interpretation of beauty in life under the light of the incarnation."

But unfortunately Westcott, like everybody else, thought that the Christian Church had started with an initial prejudice against art and that the evidence of history thus ran counter to his views. His essay therefore has helped to perpetuate errors which he accentuates in his desire to be fair to the other side. (1) He thought that Christianity had begun in an environment which was opposed to art because it was a Jewish environment. Without going aside into questions of Biblical chronology, we may assert with no fear of contradiction that the Hebrew religion had not been

[1] Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, "The Greek Text," with Notes and Essays, 2nd edition, 1886. Appendix on *The Relation of Christianity to Art*, pp. 331–74.

opposed to art, and that the Christian Church had no such environment to combat. (2) He thought that some of the earliest Christian writers condemned art. In every case it can be shown that it was not art that was condemned by them, but some misuse of it: even the intensely (and heretically) puritan Tertullian refused to admit—not the *artifices* but only the *artifices idolorum*.[1] (3) Christian archæology was still in its youth when Westcott wrote. He thought that the Catacombs of Rome were exceptional in their art and that their chronology was uncertain. We now know that similar art with the same iconography existed all over Mediterranean Christendom; and the various frescoes are now dated to within half a century or less.

Before we proceed to look a little further into the historical evidence, we may sum up the present misunderstanding by saying that it is due to ignorance caused by:—

[1] The view that the Early Church had set its face against the religious use of art was so confidently held in Protestant circles that for some time credence was refused to the discoveries of early Christian art in the Catacombs and elsewhere. The view was based upon the documents quoted by Westcott.

(1) A canon of the local Spanish synod of Elvira c. 303, had been made famous by Protestant controversialists, and is quoted by Westcott: it forbids pictures in the churches, "'ne quod colitur et adoratur in parietibus depingatur," a curious inversion of language. Harnack (*Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, Eng. Trans. 1908, vol. ii, pp. 303–4) shows how exceptional this synod was, in the degradation which it vainly combated—murder, superstition, and incredible lechery among bishops and lay folk; exceptional also at that time in forbidding the marriage of the clergy, though the controversialists did not quote it on this head. There are two other instances which Westcott gives. (2) Eusebius of Cæsarea († c. 339) wrote to the Empress Constantia that images of Christ are forbidden and that he had disapproved of an image of Paul. This is an instance of the Eastern aversion to images which led in the eighth century to the iconoclastic controversy. It does not represent any opposition to art, for Eusebius loves describing the magnificence of Christian churches. The iconoclastic emperors were also great patrons of art in general. (3) Epiphanius († 403) tore asunder a veil "bearing a fanciful image of Christ or of some saint" in a village church in Palestine. Images of Christ and of the saints were common, none the less, in the times of Epiphanius and Eusebius, both in Constantinople and Rome. Perhaps I may add that I have great sympathy with these early opponents of such images. The maudlin misrepresentations of Christ in contemporary religious art make one wish that nothing of the kind had ever been allowed. That so much traditional religion is Docetic, regarding Christ as not really human, is largely due to bad art. At the same time it may be true that Christianity would not have succeeded in converting Europe if representations of Christ had been forbidden altogether.

1. The absence of any traditional philosophy. The very word "æsthetic" was only given its present meaning by Baumgarten in 1750, and it was dragged in the mud during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The world has had its working rules of conduct in short axioms, creeds and catechisms; but it has had no catechism of æsthetic principles. In this we have been less fortunate perhaps than China, where the Zen doctrine did give the artist a spiritual principle,—the idea that art is a kind of Zen, or digging down to the divine within us; that it is in fact one form of the meditation and mental concentration whereby men obtain access to that part of their nature which is universal and divine. Many artists in the West must have felt this, and said it; but it was not codified for the multitude, any more than were the main principles of Hegel's "Æsthetic."

2. The confusion of the Christian tradition caused by the hardening of mediæval thought under monastic influence; and the consequent classical and Hebraistic reactions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which have continued down to our own time.

3. The almost complete ignorance of both early Christian and Byzantine art, even among Church historians, and, by contrast with this, the universal teaching of classical iconography in the schools of Europe, from generation to generation.

4. The consequent ignorance of the development of art during the Christian era, and especially of the enormous difficulties, due to the break-up of the Imperial system of ancient Rome, which were encountered and gradually overcome.

We must therefore speak at rather more length about the surviving examples of that early Christian art which was produced in the two hundred and fifty years before Constantine.

Asia

For the reader's sake, we will avoid the complications involved in a discussion of the Farther East and confine ourselves to Mediterranean Christendom—the usual area of the historian. But in so doing we must not forget that we are ignoring about two-thirds of the territory. The early Church spread rapidly over Mesopotamia and Persia (reaching ultimately to Chinese Turkestan, and even to China, as well as to South India): in the Persian Empire the Church enjoyed complete freedom during the time that she was being persecuted in that of Rome: Armenia became a Christian state before Constantine began the Christianization of the Roman Empire. The art of this vast Iranian area had always been non-representational; and, when Christianity arrived, it was expressed by symbols and not by figure-art. Strzygowski is doubtless right in stating, as a result of thirty years' excavations, that the real cradle of Christian art lies about the Tigris and Euphrates and in the regions beyond: this art gave us the dome and the vault, mainly by way of Antioch and Constantinople (S. Sofia itself being really an Armenian church), and through its impact with the Northern races became the parent of the so-called Romanesque and Gothic architectures. Therefore, although we are now to consider the art of Europe, we must remember that Greco-Roman art was only a branch—and at the time was a subsidiary branch—of the art of that religion which, beginning in Syria, spread to the "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia," more rapidly than to the Empire of the West. From the evolutionary point of view, the art of the Roman Catacombs has little value, because it was not the germ of Christian art, but the last stage of Greco-Roman art; but as evidence of the Christian spirit in art it is of immense value, and it is all that remains extant in any freshness or abundance.

Pre-Constantinian Art

The world at the beginning of our era was in great need of moral reform, but it was not (as it is to-day) corrupted by ugliness, and it did not begin to show signs of marked æsthetic decadence till the second century. The infant Church concentrated its energies on moral reform; but it did not neglect art. Accepting the Greco-Roman art of the time, the Church in the Mediterranean area accompanied that art through its decline till the age of Constantine, and then with increasing power effected a remarkable recovery. Since the Roman Catacombs were rediscovered in 1578 and systematically explored and photographed in recent years, it has been established that several examples of Christian painting exist which belong to the period when the Gospels were being written.

These Gospels are necessarily taken up with urgent moral and religious questions, but they are singularly pictorial in character, and they give us glimpses of the Founder of Christianity, which show him not only as a great Reformer, but also as a human being without the usual limitations of the reformer, full of imagination, insight, poetry. It is good to know that he sang, that he was once deeply moved by the architecture of the Temple, and once by its desecration, that he was deeply moved also by the sight of a town spreading out at his feet, that he defended, against Judas, the "waste" of money on a beautiful act, that he loved to withdraw himself into the silent influences of Nature, that he noticed with an intimate sympathy the flowers and the birds, and that he was the first man on record to proclaim the loveliness of little children. He thought in pictures and he taught in pictures; he had the mind of a poet, and some of his sayings have come down to us in definite poetic form. He presented ethics to the world under the aspect of beauty, and he made his followers think

of God in the new and lovely way of a very human Father, and of himself as the ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς—the Beautiful Shepherd. They have since distorted his teaching in many ways, but they have never ceased to think of saintliness in terms of beauty (the very word χάρις, "grace," means loveliness and delight), nor ever forgotten to picture heaven as the place where

> "In that land of beauty
> All things of beauty meet."

The commentary supplied by those remaining frescoes in the Catacombs, which are of the apostolic and sub-apostolic era, give us the same impression. Painted by torchlight in the gloom of these confined and terrifying chambers, they are as free from the sadness of pagan funereal art as from the horror of damnation which was fastened upon the Christian art of a later period. They are funereal; yet they bring the light of the gay life above—birds and flowers, garlands and landscapes, winged genii and *putti*—down to the chambers of the dead. There is indeed no thought of death, and hardly a sign that many who lay there had met the death of martyrs. The tiny chapels, made only for memorial purposes, are so gaily decorated that, were their white plaster and bright wreaths copied in a modern church, the congregation would say: "They have made our church look like a theatre"; and were these admirable decorations used to supplant the stolid gilding of a London theatre, the critics would say: "The influence of the Russian ballet is spreading into the auditorium." It was the Greco-Roman art of the period which the first Christians used, employing doubtless the ordinary craftsmen of the city,[1] since the burying-places of Christians were protected by law, even when their persons were not. But they used this art with a difference:

[1] The artists of Rome were mostly Greek, but there was also a strong Alexandrian influence. The Church throughout Italy was also mostly Greek; only two bishops of Rome before Victor (189–199) have Latin names.

they purged it of objectionable features, such as can still be seen in Pompeii to-day, and they chose such objects as were not purely decorative with a definite symbolical meaning. There exist examples of the latter part of the first century—Daniel between two heraldic-looking lions (as a type of deliverance); a fisherman, a lamb, and three pictures of the Good—the "Beautiful"—Shepherd, always a fair, beardless youth, dressed as a shepherd of the Campagna, in a short tunic, sometimes with a staff, and sometimes playing upon the pipes.

In the extant work of the second and third centuries, spread among the 500 miles of the Roman Catacombs, the subjects are multiplied, and there appears a certain amount of *genre* painting; but their character is little changed. The style is that of the age, but the character is always unmistakably Christian,—blithe, tender, symbolical. Orpheus sometimes appears as a type of Christ, and the Good Shepherd is sometimes shown surrounded by his flock, a subject which becomes more common in the fourth century.

We are compelled to estimate the art of this first period rather by its subject-matter than by its technique; for the painters employed must have been drawn at first from the ordinary pagan workshops where the guilds of the period worked under their Greek guild-masters. But there is an absolute distinction from the beginning, not only in the spirit, the marked use of symbolism, and the general iconography, but also in the composition of early Christian painting; for, whereas Greco-Roman art was increasingly crowded with "superfluous and useless additions," the painting in the Catacombs always avoids the massing together of figures and concentrates on the simple elements of each scene.[1]

[1] A. della Seta, *Religione e arte figurata*, 1912. Professor della Seta must, however, be mistaken in attributing the carelessness of some of the later work to religious reasons. Underground painting tends to be careless, and the general art of the time was deteriorating in the third century.

It is commonly assumed that all early Christian art was funereal in character; but we have no right to make the assumption. The painting that has survived is funereal because the Catacombs have survived—if indeed the epithet funereal may be applied to work so astonishingly cheerful and in such striking contrast with the funereal art of later times; but the early Christians did not live in the Catacombs, nor did they worship in the Catacombs except at memorial services. They lived above ground like other people, and they worshipped at first in the *atria* of private houses, then in what Harnack calls hall-churches; and long before Constantine they had large churches of their own. "The Christians," complained Porphyry, who was born in 233, "in rivalry of our temples, build very large houses (μεγίστους οἴκους) where they assemble to pray."

Diocletian ordered the destruction of all churches throughout the Empire; but the churches in Rome condemned by him in 300 were not after all destroyed, for Maxentius restored them in 311 to the Bishop Miltiades; and we know that about the year 315 there were over forty basilicas in the city.[1] But, alas! we can only imagine the art of these Christian homes and churches: the amazing wealth of vessels and candelabra, which Constantine gave a few years later, helps us to form a general idea of what the more frugal ornament had been in the third century; for custom is conservative in such matters, and the documents show that a considerable ceremonial had grown up by the end of the second century. As for the art of people's houses, we have one or two clues—the statuettes of the Good Shepherd, for instance, many engraved gems from the second

[1] P. Batiffol, *La Paix constantinienne*, 1914, p. 177; *La Messe*, 1919, p. 47; A. Harnack, *Mission und Ausbreitung*, 1915, II. Appendix to chap. ii. Harnack attributes the hall-churches mainly to the second century, and the early basilicas to the almost unbroken period of peace between 160 and 203.

century onwards, tapestries in Egypt from the third, and the patrician house of the Martyrs John and Paul on the Cælian hill, which show that the homes of upper-class Christians were decorated in the same style as those of pagans. Most significant perhaps of all were the innumerable glass vessels found in the Catacombs, especially those in gold-glass—a third and fourth century art, almost entirely associated with Christianity—which are decorated with the same religious subjects as the Catacombs themselves; and also with pictures of saints, especially Peter and Paul, with very many *genre* subjects (a carpenter's shop, for example), and with representations of a married pair or a family group. Many of these were doubtless wedding or birthday presents; and many bear the usual toasts, *Pie zeses*—"Drink and Live!" or "Take a crown, drink and live!" We need not assume, then, that these Christians only knew how to die.

Basilican Art

From the third century, Greco-Roman civilization had been consciously decadent, in statecraft, education, literature and art. Christianity came into power during the fourth century, too late to save the Empire, but not too late to reconstruct civilization. Already, by the year 400, the Goths were crossing the Danube, pushed southward by the more desperate savagery of the Huns from Asia. In 410 Alaric sacked Rome. Thenceforward till the rise of Romanesque art in the middle of the Christian era, the condition of Europe may be described in a sentence. Wave after wave of barbarians swept over Europe—Goths, Vandals, Lombards, Franks, Burgundians, Angles, Saracens, Vikings—while Constantinople alone remained inviolate within its shrinking territories: the Church survived each merciless conquest, mitigated its horrors, tamed, converted, and gradually civilized the conquerors.

She had strengthened herself for the task after the formal recognition of 313, when she ceased to be a proscribed sect; and the result of that new power is written in the basilican churches of Constantine's reign. Those in Byzantium disappeared long ago, but superb examples in Rome still exist, though old S. Peter's, Constantine's greatest church, was pulled down in the sixteenth century.

There is a remarkable change in this new ecclesiastical work. The last buildings of pagan Rome are unwaveringly Roman: Diocletian's baths, the basilica so-called of Maxentius, which Constantine finished in his own name, the triumphal arch which also bears his name, decadent though they are, show no trace of any new development. Constantine the statesman built in the old style; but in the work of Constantine the Christian there is an absolute break, a complete change of type. Without a sign of any transition, the imperial basilican church appears in Rome.

No doubt the explanation is that the Emperor was copying those older basilican churches which had existed, as we have said, since the second century, and were an adaptation of the Hellenistic timber-roofed hall, with some elements perhaps derived from domestic architecture. The basilican church was excellently adapted to the requirements of the new faith. It had no relationship with the temples of the pagan religions, for these were houses of the gods and not built for congregational worship: the sacrifice was made on the threshold of the temple, not within, and the worshipper saluted with a gesture. The basilica, on the other hand, was a home where many people could assemble together for worship—already in the third century it is called *domus ecclesiæ*—and there were generally smaller rooms grouped about it. It expressed the unity of the people as they stood in the great nave before the altar, which was ringed about with deacons, and behind which the

bishop presided, sitting in the apse where the higher clergy were placed around him in a semicircle.

Christianity differed from paganism in being a religion of fellowship, requiring great congregational services. Its immediate need had been a large building, lightly constructed and freed from the tyranny of the entablature, protected from the weather by the simplest of walls and roofs, its ornament concentrated on the interior. Such was the basilica—of a long, rectangular plan, with a courtyard, narthex, nave, and apse, and with single or double aisles, where (in spite of the curtains that came to be hung between the columns), large numbers of people could assist. The basilican style was unprogressive, excellently suited, as it happened, to hold its own through the difficult ages that were to follow. After a thousand years had passed, basilicas were still built in some places; indeed Brunellesco's two great so-called Renaissance churches at Florence, begun in 1430, are but basilicas with a dome at the crossing, like Pisa Cathedral, which was begun in 1063. But for the most part the basilican style in Italy passed through Byzantinesque almost insensibly into Romanesque; though the basilica has never ceased to supply the general plan upon which Christian churches are built. The basilica was the European contribution to Christian architecture; the dome and the vault were the Asiatic contributions from Armenia and Persia, and from Mesopotamia, respectively.

In painting, the fourth century brought about a marked change, at least so far as the iconography is concerned: the transition can be studied in the Catacombs, where painting is continued through the Constantinian era. The symbolism becomes more obvious, more dogmatic, and less mystical; more ecclestiastical, more didactic, and less religious. This is best illustrated by a single fact: the Good Shepherd disappears, and is replaced by the imperial Despot, a figure in

type and costume recalling the images of Augustus himself.

Art is expression, and it expresses among other things the conditions and the mentality of those who use it. Art, in fact, is an interpreter of history, and it is only a misconception either of history or of art that has caused some writers to ignore or deny this fact. Christian art before Constantine was democratic, in the sense that it expressed the ideas of the people, but let us drop the overstrained word "democratic" and say that Christian art was *vernacular*. The Good Shepherd never was popular among theologians and church-authorities until the nineteenth century: he is hardly mentioned even in the earliest Christian writings. But the people loved him: and the Church is not the theologians, nor the bishops, nor the other clergy, but the whole Christian community. Once or twice in history the Christian community has become vocal and has expressed itself. There was thus a modest vernacular art in the Early Church—in the little-known Churches of Asia, as in Rome —a magnificent vernacular art in the Gothic period, and another in Florence, at least from the time of Giotto to that of Botticelli, when the people were not dictated to from above.[1] The religion of the Early Church—not in Rome only but everywhere—was the religion of the Good Shepherd. Then came the gradual establishment of Christianity in the West under Constantine, bringing much good both in life and in art; but it took away the Good Shepherd.

A new form of Christianity became paramount, hierarchic in its life, hieratical in its art. Byzantinism follows—again bringing much good with it and creating a magnificent art; but its Christ is the Pantokrator of the great mosaics, the awful ruler and judge, not the Beautiful Shepherd; and its subject-matter is neither the cheerful symbolism of the

[1] See Wilhelm Bode, *Florentine Bildhauer der Renaissance*, 1902, chap. i. Florentine art survived the Medicean usurpation for fifty years.

Early Church, nor the balder Constantinian record of Old and New Testament history, but the Kalendar of the Eastern Church. Art, in fact, became imperial, dogmatic, ecclesiastical, and iconolatrous. It expressed exactly the thought and life of the time.

In sculpture there was during the Constantinian era a dovetailing of the old Greco-Roman art with the new Christian art in the Hellenistic tradition. Christian sculpture had existed in the West before Constantine, in spite of the danger of idolatry: a few sarcophagi of the third century survive and of the eight statuettes of the Good Shepherd which have been found, the one at the Lateran (attributed to the third century) is of singular grace and charm. Most of the extant Christian sculpture is upon sarcophagi (which have a high survival value) and, because the carving of sarcophagi was a flourishing trade at the time, there was at first no distinction between pagan and Christian examples, except in the subject-matter. They were just ordered at the shops. But already by the time of Constantine a definitely Christian style appears at Ravenna, in the beautiful sarcophagi with animated distinctive figures, as different as possible from the crowded reliefs of the traditional Greco-Roman style.

Meanwhile Greco-Roman sculpture, which had been declining in the second and third centuries, continued on the down-grade. Coinage especially grows very unequal, sometimes of perfect execution, sometimes barbarously bad, especially between the sixth and eighth centuries, though we must not judge the art of a period entirely by its coinage, unless we are prepared to have the England of to-day estimated by its pennies or its postage-stamps. Side by side with the declining Greco-Roman sculpture, the new Christian work develops, but it is Byzantine in character: the influence of the lands on the far borders of the Eastern

Empire—Persia and Mesopotamia—was already penetrating the Hellenistic world, and that influence was decorative and strongly against the plastic representation of the human form. Byzantine art, therefore, tended to confine itself to sculpture in relief; figure-sculpture on a large scale declined during the fourth and fifth centuries and had become exceptional in the age of Justinian.

Byzantine Art

There is no need to dwell on Byzantine architecture, since everyone now recognizes that it is one of the most glorious inventions in the history of mankind. All our Western domes are the children of S. Sofia, where the art of Asia comes to the succour of the art of Europe; and S. Sofia is, as William Morris said, the finest building in the world. That wonderful creation had many sisters in Constantinople, each full of originality, some of which have also escaped destruction. Byzantine churches hardly less fine are still to be found in the Balkan Peninsula, and, with a difference, in Sicily. S. Mark's at Venice is a purely Byzantine church, copied in the eleventh century from the Church of the Apostles at Constantinople (since destroyed); and Byzantine churches cover the vast area of Russia to-day, from the Baltic to the sea of Japan.

Painting, the specifically Christian art of painting with cubes of coloured glass upon large wall surfaces, is another undisputed glory of the Byzantine genius. Glass mosaic springs at once into perfection with the earliest examples we possess: those of Constantine, Theodoric, Justinian, at Rome and Ravenna, are among the greatest works of art that man has produced; and in them also the ideas of Asia are blended with those of Europe. Mosaic flourished for a thousand years, and if it changed but little, this was because there was but little room for change: nothing could improve,

for instance, the colour and design of the pictures in S. Vitale or S. Apollinare Nuovo, and what is left at S. Sofia shows that the work there was not inferior. In nearly all the examples—in Europe, Western Asia and North Africa, all round the Mediterranean—there is the same splendid simplicity of design, the same shimmering, glowing, dusky glory of colour. We can understand why, until the thirteenth century, painting in fresco or tempera was regarded as a cheap substitute for painting in stained and gilded glass, and is a sign in a great city like Rome of weakness and distress in contemporary history.

The surviving mosaics and frescoes show how profoundly mistaken is the idea that there was no great painting before Cimabue. Intervals of weakness there were;[1] but there was no gap: from the Catacombs, from the great mosaics of the fourth and sixth centuries to those of the eleventh at Daphni in Attica, S. Luke in Phocis, and Torcello; or to the noble frescoes of that period at S. Clemente in Rome; or to the mosaics at S. Mark's, Venice, from the eleventh to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; or those of the twelfth century in Sicily, and of the fourteenth in what is now the Kahrié Djami Mosque at Constantinople: and, side by side with the monumental painting there run like a commentary all through this millennium the fine miniatures of innumerable manuscripts, which counteracted the tendency to immobility and isolation of the wall-pictures, and kept alive the tradition of action by their representation of narrative subjects.[2]

[1] As at S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, in the seventh century; and generally, so far as we know, in the eighth. In Rome we have no mosaics between c. 710 and c. 800, but the discovery of S. Maria Antiqua has revealed some frescoes, and we know that Gregory III (731–41), the opponent of the Iconoclasts, patronized the painters. In mosaic again there is a decline after S. Nereo ed Achilleo (c. 800), in S. Prassede (817–24), and more marked in S. Maria in Domnica. There are frescoes of c. 850 at S. Clemente, in the vivacious Carolingian style of the North, and good Byzantine work of the tenth century at S. Elia, Nepi.

[2] As this whole matter is but little known, it may be as well to give a list here of some typical surviving examples: 4 *Cent.*: Mosaics; Rome, S. Costanza (A.D. 330), S.

Sculpture, as we have said, in the fourth century recovered from its decline, and developed under the inspiration of the artistic influence brought by the Church from the Eastern Empire. This sculpture was the direct descendant of Hellenistic art, but it was modified by the aversion to human representation which came into Byzantium from the Asiatic side. Henceforward, sculpture was in relief and on a small scale, such as that of the admirable fifth-century doors of S. Sabina, or the beautiful ivory diptych of some fifty years or so later (Adam in Eden and St. Paul at Malta), now in the Bargello at Florence, or the many other examples of less distinction.

It was fortunate for Europe that Byzantine sculpture continued to be on a small scale for the next thousand years, until the fall indeed of Constantinople at a time when Donatello and his fellow-craftsmen had nothing more to learn; because the birth of sculpture in France and Italy was due, mainly, to the portable Byzantine ivories.

The influence of Constantinople, which remained un-

Pudenziana (c. 395). 5 *Cent.*: Rome, S. Maria Maggiore (perhaps by Syrian artists. Some of the work may be earlier); Lateran Baptistery. 6 *Cent.*: The great mosaics of Ravenna; Rome, S. Cosma e Damiano; Parenzo in Istria. 6–8 *Cent.*: Salonika, S. Demetrius and S. Sofia. 7 *Cent.*: (The most ancient mosaics of Palestine have been destroyed, but the monastery of S. Catherine on Mount Sinai is probably 7 Cent.); Rome, mosaics of S. Agnese, S. Venanzio. 8 *Cent.*: last frescoes in the Catacombs; S. Maria Antiqua. 9 *Cent.*: Rome, mosaics at S. Prassede, etc.; Nicæa, Church of the Koimesis. 10 *Cent.*: Rome, frescoes, S. Maria in Pallaria; Nepi, S. Elia; Oberzell in Reichenau. For a MS. example, the Paris Psalter: there was an original Anglo-Saxon school of miniaturists (c. 950–1100), influenced by Egypt and Syria. 11 *Cent.*: Great mosaics at Daphni; Torcello; S. Mark's Venice; and S. Sofia, Kiev; Roman frescoes at S. Urbano alla Caffarella, and the famous examples at S. Clemente; S. Savin, Vienne, France. 12 *Cent.*: Apse mosaics of S. Clemente; S. Maria in Trastevere, and S. Maria Nuova, Rome. 13 *Cent.*: Mosaics at S. Mark's continue. Painters: Giunta da Pisa, painting in 1202; Coppo di Marcovaldo in 1261; Guido da Siena in 1271; Cimabue in Rome, 1272; Duccio in 1278; Cavallini in 1280; Giotto at Assisi, c. 1295. Mosaicists: Cimabue, Cavallini, Giotto; Torriti and Rusuti in Rome, 1291–5. 14 *Cent.*: Giotto dies, 1336; Simone Martini, the Lorenzetti, etc. 15 *Cent.*: Masaccio, Botticelli, etc., early work of Michelangelo, etc.

Since the above was in type, there has appeared a monumental work by Wilpert, *Die Römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der Kirchlichen Bauten vom IV bis XIII Jahrhundert* (Herder, Freiburg i. B.). The extent of his record may be gathered from the fact that there are 300 coloured plates, with 542 other illustrations, and that the book costs £140.

conquered during this thousand years and went through no dark ages, is in fact the key to the understanding of mediæval art. Throughout the difficult era when the barbarians were being educated, Byzantine miniatures and ivories, spreading westward along the trade-routes, kept the memory of art alive, and gradually effected its recovery. Sculpture is the most difficult art for uneducated races to appreciate: the Gaulish soldiers had shouted with laughter at the sight of the statues of Delphi; and we have barbaric sculpture in Gaul down to the end of the tenth century—huge feet and hands, large eyes in the middle of the temple, noses more than half the length of the face, and ears like jug-handles. Till the year 1000, European art can be classified under two heads, Byzantinism and Barbarism.

This Byzantine maternity is still insufficiently realized. For this long millennium, until its capture by the Turks in 1453, Constantinople continued to be the chief centre both of learning and of art. The other great cities were children of the city that stood on the frontier between Asia and Europe. Ravenna was already Byzantine when it became the new capital of the shrinking Western Empire. Rome was a Greek city from the sixth to the ninth century—the Rome, for instance, to which our English Benedict Biscop sent for his pictures and his music. Calabria and Apulia were colonized by Greek monks from the ninth to the eleventh century. Italian architecture became Byzantinesque between the sixth and eleventh centuries, before it was Romanesque. Venice was for seven centuries a great Byzantine city. It was the Greek monks of South Italy who had supplied his models to Duccio: Byzantine art made the work of Cimabue possible, and lay behind the discoveries of Giotto.

Thus, until Europe began to settle down in the eleventh century, art was kept alive and developed all over Europe by the Christian nations of the East, and was fostered and

encouraged by the monks of the West. The "harsh, emaciated," and "Lethean" look of some earlier mediæval art which has so often been laid to the charge of Christianity, is simply due to the fact that the full-blooded young races in the West had not yet acquired the necessary technique. So far from the Church being opposed to the human form, she required that form, as we have already said, for the teaching of her doctrines, because her message was the incarnation of divinity, and because she knew what some modern painters tend to forget—that you cannot represent the soul of man without some adequate representation of his body. Before their conversion Goths and Celts alike had an art which was purely decorative, intricate combinations of line, which had little message for the soul: it was Christianity that established a higher art among the barbarians, because it gave them a religion to which the presentation of the human form was essential.[1]

It was not the fault of Gibbon or Grote, or our grandfathers, that they knew nothing of all this: travel was difficult in their day, the East was almost inaccessible, excavation had hardly begun; comparative study was impossible before the invention of photography. But there is no excuse for us if we continue to think in these categories. Every year we are making fresh discoveries even in Rome itself: Constantinople is only now coming within reach of scientific examination: Asia Minor and Syria have had little more than a preliminary survey; the all-important land in North Mesopotamia, now called Diarbekir, still awaits excavation. Yet we have already discovered that Romanesque architecture is indebted in a surprising degree to the Christian East —to Mesopotamia, to Syria, where have been discovered hundreds of remarkable churches of the fourth and fifth centuries, laid waste by the first fury of Islam, and to Ar-

[1] See O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archæology*, 1911, pp. 25–6.

menia, where a later but not less remarkable architecture lies in the wilderness of a later desolation.

Romanesque and Gothic

Of Romanesque and Gothic art we need not speak at any length. In the former, the young races had come into their strength, still under monastic tutelage: in the latter, they express their full humanity, freely, turbulently, and yet with a singular precision of logical science. There was never anything before at all like the amazing vitality with which Romanesque, already flourishing in many varied forms, developed into one style of Gothic after another, each original and audacious, following natural laws and developing natural ornament. Gothic differs from all other architecture in its naturalism, its freedom, its growth; it differs from all except Byzantine in its daring and romance; it introduced into the art of building the new principles of elasticity and luminosity. Interrupted for a few centuries by an eruption of pedantry, discredited in the nineteenth century by an imitation not less pedantic, the Gothic spirit was rediscovered in the scientific doctrine of evolution; and the Gothic principle of building—its soaring audacity, its forward-looking, democratic liberty—will be the principle of all building in the future, whether in steel or stone, timber or concrete. Yet the parent Romanesque was so noble that we can hardly pardon Gothic for leaving it behind.

Both styles of architecture spring from the same practical and very significant source. The disappearance of slave-labour had made it impossible to build in the classical manner with huge blocks of stone: from this necessity of using stones which one man could handle, Romanesque architecture arose, and the mason became a free man and an artist.

The Development in Iconography and the Triumph of Humanism

The subject-matter of Byzantine painting and sculpture continued in the East with little change until the fifteenth century, when the prospect of a great development similar to that of Italy was destroyed by the fall of Constantinople. In the West, after the long barbaric interlude, monasticism dictated the didactic iconography of the Romanesque period —Christ, suffering or triumphant, stories of the saints, and the Last Judgment (to frighten the evil-doer). During the Gothic period art became again vernacular; and, though the clergy continued to use the devils of the Last Judgment to assist them in their difficult work of taming our ancestors, there is a very wonderful extension of figurative art, and the calm radiance of Gothic statuary includes the personification of all the known arts and sciences, and is surrounded by every kind of lovely natural form. The art of the thirteenth century is at once strenuous and serene, confident and tender, lofty and gay.

In the fourteenth century, when France is at the depth of her miseries, the old cheerful confidence is gone: an ingratiating air is noticeable in the Madonnas of a Church that is being questioned and has embarked on persecution. A wave also of sadness sweeps over West Christian art, and the Black Death emphasizes a morbid sentimentalism, rejoicing in the *macabre*, in tears and blood, which has not yet to-day been shaken off: S. Francis has already popularized the crucifix, and scenes from the Passion replace the legends of the saints upon the carved altar-pieces. France, torn by faction and wasted by invasion, has lost the lead which she had held since the first beginnings of Gothic art.

The torch passes to Italy, where humanism and realism

become powerful in the hands of the Gothic painters and sculptors, Giotto, Giovanni Pisano, and their contemporaries. But during the fourteenth century an enthusiasm for classical antiquity grows up, and gradually makes itself felt in architecture and sculpture, and then in painting; so that by the end of the fifteenth century artists like Mantegna, Botticelli and Pietro di Cosimo are painting mythological subjects. These men are Christians—one of them takes part in the revivalism of Savonarola—but they are also sharers in a revolt. What has happened?

The Intellectual Revolution has begun, and humanism is overthrowing mediævalism. For long, the clergy had made art extremely didactic: the rest of the Church, the laity, had agreed in this; for the Church indeed was still the whole Christian community, and a man like Giotto was as anxious to paint the story of S. Francis and the ecclesiastical cycle from the Gospels and from the apocryphal legends of Mary, as the clergy were to have them painted. But a century after Giotto's death, the Church (which is the whole company of Christian people) is less identified with the clergy. The old subjects have ceased to be adequate; the morbid sadness which had overspread Gothic art in fourteenth-century France has little echo in Italy, where during the same era there has been arising a joy in life which is often imagined to be pagan but is really of the very essence of New Testament Christianity.

For indeed Christianity, after the anchorite passion which followed the settlement of Constantine, had never been entirely free from that common disease of religion—asceticism. In spite of the fact that Christ had taught, not asceticism but health, and had actually been attacked because he ate and drank like other people, there had crept over Christendom the old cult of suffering, which has its roots in the old ideas of the cruelty of the gods. Asceticism

had never become the religion of the people as a whole, but it was the ideal of many of the most devoted communities and individuals: and it was widely proclaimed by the ecclesiastical authorities, although in strict theology it was only regarded as one way, and not necessarily a better way, of serving God.

Humanism was the revolt of the educated layman against ecclesiastical restraint. The Church had educated a large number of people, and naturally enough wanted to retain the leading-strings: this became increasingly difficult as the book gradually supplanted the battle-axe; the upper classes began to look for larger fields of life, for wider knowledge, for *literæ humaniores*. By the end of the fourteenth century, Humanism had become powerful; but it had originated long before: it goes back indeed behind Petrarch to Marsiglio of Padua, to Dante, to Frederic II, to S. Francis even, and behind him to the Albigenses, and the troubadours, and to Abélard.

Humanism is the product of the second millennium of Christian history; and it has increased in power to the present day.

The Classical Revival was a sequel to Humanism, supplying that core of reaction which is to be found in all revolutions. It has been an illuminative but never a creative movement, and is at the present day a brake upon the energy of natural science. Men who desire change turn instinctively to the past for evidence that what they seek has already been found practicable in some former age; and there was no other way when the view of life was universally static. In those days men required documentary authority for their revolutions as well as for their traditions; and they found it, towards the end of the Middle Ages, in the literature of antiquity, in the classics of Rome and in the Bible; and then in the classics of Greece and the Greek

Testament, which produced the New Learning, coincident with the invention of the printing-press.

There were both paganizing and Judaizing extremists, but the Intellectual Revolution, in its Humanist as well as in its Protestant forms, was a revolt of Churchmen against mediæval theology, against the monastic orders and the rank and file of conservative clergy.

All this needs emphasizing, because it has long been assumed that art arose, as it were, on the ashes of the Church, and was the result of a pagan reaction against Christianity. A hundred years ago it was thought that even architecture had failed to exist between the Colosseum and Palladio. Symonds, as we have seen, said the same thing about figure representation; and the error is still assumed among those painters and connoisseurs who have had too little historical training. It is important, therefore, to make it clear: (1) That a great art existed before the improvements in technique inaugurated by Giotto. (2) That these improvements had no more to do with paganism than had Byzantine or Romanesque architecture. (3) That when the worship of the past helped to produce the Free Renaissance architecture of Florence, in the fifteenth century, it had but little influence on sculpture, and hardly any at all on painting. (4) That Christendom had never broken with the classical tradition but had added elements from Christian Asia and had developed it, Byzantine art being a development of Hellenistic art, and the architecture of Western Christendom a similar development, vitalized also by influences from the Christian East. (5) That the greatest humanists were also good Christians, and that the Intellectual Revolution was a movement within the Church which enormously helped forward her true self-realization, and brought that religion which is common to modern Christendom a good deal nearer to the teaching of Christ than it had been in the Middle Ages.

At first the Church—the Church of the clergy—was torn by conflicting emotions, and in Italy was sometimes pagan and persecuting at the same time—as was Pope Alexander VI, to take an extreme instance. In the end, she failed to adapt herself to the new ideas. Already separated from the Church of the East, the Western Church—the whole company of Christians this side of the Adriatic and of Russia—was split into a multitude of sects, and so it remains—divided, but not less Christian than it was before the first great separation of the eleventh century. Division has proved to be an unhappy but inevitable stage in the slow evolution of the Church towards the ideal of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Protestantism arose, to modify but not to destroy the art of Christendom. One of the results of the Reformation was that the Dutch masters were induced to divert their energies to landscape and *genre;* and for all this, as for mythology and for portraiture, there is precedent, curiously enough, in the earliest Christian painting—that of the Catacombs. But we must not forget that Protestantism gave us also one of the greatest of all religious painters—Rembrandt.

Iconography is not the determining factor of religion in art, for art is religious in the spirit and not by the letter. Chaucer did not become a pagan because he wrote "Palamon and Arcite," nor Shakespeare, nor Dryden, nor Browning because they, in their turn, made use of mythology; nor did G. F. Watts cease to be a Christian when he painted the Minotaur. The best men among the Italian painters of the Culmination, like Botticelli, Christianized pagan themes, just as the worst have succeeded in paganizing Christian themes.

"Frankly pagan" is an epithet sometimes applied to great artists like Titian and Giorgione in their mythological sub-

jects; but this is precisely what they were not. No pagan Venus was ever like the Venus of Titian: he does not accept her frankly, as one might accept a sister or a mother; he is interested in her because she is so completely foreign to his own ideals of womanhood. His Bacchus, in the National Gallery, does seem to express his ideal of youth: but then his Bacchus is a figure that might in a quieter mood assist without impropriety at an Entombment. Nor are the glorious creatures of Giorgione less further removed from the naïve simplicity of pagan art: their physical beauty is like nothing antique. They are the heirs of Mediæval Venice and of Florence, and the inspiration of many Christian centuries breathes on their unsullied brows.

In modern times the true Church, which is as large as Christendom, has not narrowed her art, but has retained mythology, and landscape and portraiture among the subject-matter of European painting, considering that nothing human can be alien to her: and she has not been the less Christian for that.

At the same time it must be remembered that there had been a good side to the comparatively restricted range of subjects in the Middle Ages. The iconography was indeed not nearly so limited as people imagine; it included Aristotle and Plato, the Arts and Sciences, Nature, and the most free and varied grotesque: and it is hardly fair to say, as a great living art-critic does, that the Church patronized art "for its own purposes."[1] It was the people as well as the clergy who wanted religious subjects; it was the ordinary layman who paid the artist, quite as much as the ecclesiastic; and surely the patronage of the plutocrat has been no improvement on that of the parish church. Artists have to be paid by someone: they have always had to suffer from patrons, and it may be questioned whether the modern period has

[1] Bernhard Berensen, *Venetian Painters of the Renaissance*, 3rd edition, p. 9.

brought a change for the better. They were sometimes overworked in saints and prophets, and were unduly restricted to the Madonna; but at the present day there must be some painters who sigh for the freedom of that earlier servitude, wishing sometimes that they had to paint Our Lady instead of My Lord, saints instead of satin, and prophets instead of profiteers.

The Theory of Resuscitation

To understand the greatness of the Christian developments of art during the settlement of Europe between the years 1000 and 1500, we must discard the misleading talk about the Renaissance which was still unquestioned thirty years ago, and still distorts the views of most writers about art at the present day. Although it used to be assumed that there was no art worth mentioning till the fifteenth century —and very little then—one or two earlier Italian sculptors and painters were admitted by our fathers (more enlightened than our grandfathers) to be efficient, and were therefore promptly appropriated into the Renaissance of some two centuries later—as in J. Addington Symonds' *The Renaissance.* Yet none the less, all artists, good or bad, who had the misfortune to die before Raphael were lumped together in a queer archaic limbo as "Primitives."

Now there never has been a Renaissance or Resuscitation in human history: the idea belongs to a static view of life which has passed away. The world develops by slow or swift stages, with occasional culminating eras, which we call revolutions, but without a break; and attempts at reviving the past do but ruffle the surface of human society: forgotten principles may be recovered, but they can only be applied in the new ways. The utmost we can do for the word "Renaissance" is to apply it in architecture (which rejoices in misnomers) to that recovery from the passing

Italian debasement of Gothic which was initiated by Brunellesco in a beautiful mixture of Byzantine and Romanesque, and was afterwards perverted by the discovery and worship of the antique Vitruvius.[1]

There was no Renaissance in sculpture. Hellenistic sculpture had, as we have seen, never ceased, and was the educator of the West. By the twelfth century French masons were already producing that cathedral statuary which is as fine as the best of Greece, as fine as that of Italy in the fifteenth century. It is probably futile to compare together the great exemplars of any art; but now that we are getting over our obsessions about classical perfection and the Renaissance, and are beginning to use our eyes, it is being increasingly recognized that only the finest Greek sculpture, and no Greco-Roman sculpture at all, can be put in the same rank as that of Chartres or Reims, of Giovanni Pisano, or Donatello, or Michelangelo. And if we want to discover one effect of Christianity upon art we can see it in this sculpture. The range is much wider, much freer, and more varied than that of Greece; the types are not less universal, as is sometimes said, but less abstract, and more human; and the faces, instead of being conventional frames of physical beauty, are the expression of every phase of character, thought and emotion, wrought out by the great Florentines of the fifteenth century with incredible subtleness and profundity. They were helped, of course, by Greco-Roman examples; but all through the Christian era all the arts had been building upon Greece and upon Rome. Christianity did not invent art; it only improved art. There was no break, except those interruptions in the West caused by the barbarians. And there was no Renaissance.

[1] There is nothing in Brunellesco's work which he could not have got from the little basilica of the Apostles and the Baptistery in Florence and from the Cathedral of Pisa. If he went to Rome as a youth, as is stated by the unreliable Vasari, his work shows no traces of the visit.

Modern writers, indeed, abound in admissions, sometimes unconscious, of the fact that there was no Renaissance, though they have not yet faced up to the consequences of their admissions. For instance, Salomon Reinach in his excellent *Apollo* (significant name for a history of art) says: "L'art plastique et pictorale de la Renaissance ne doit pas s'expliquer par l'imitation des monuments antiques. Il y eut en Italie, comme dans le nord et l'est de la France, une première Renaissance au XIV^{e} siècle, qui ne s'inspira pas ou s'inspira très peu de l'antiquité."

In painting also there was no Renaissance. Painting, as we have seen, had flourished through the Middle Ages —that is, from Romulus Augustulus to the Discovery of America; and though most of the fresco work was long ago destroyed or painted over, modern discoveries are steadily filling the gap which was once supposed to exist between Ravenna and Assisi—filling it sometimes with splendid examples, such as those at S. Clemente in Rome.

Painting, indeed, from the thirteenth century has always been Gothic. It had no Vitruvius, and there was no rediscovered Pompeii to deflect the minds of Quatrocento artists: it has gone on developing its fine Gothic realism ever since, and though a Poynter may try to be classical, a Picasso is as obstinately Gothic as ever. There has been the same glorious striving, the same mastery in failure, the same diffidence in success; the same restless pursuit of new methods, the same loyal impatience with tradition, the same sense of eternal youth. And as the discovery of new methods prevails— Giotto, Masaccio, the Van Eycks, the Venetians, the Spaniards, the Dutch, Rembrandt, Constable, Manet, Cézanne —painting becomes easier for us moderns to appreciate, but the actual æsthetic quality is not necessarily therefore increased; and though it is more difficult for people to see into the earlier work, because of what intervenes, it is prob-

able that the sixth-century mosaics of Ravenna, the twelfth- and fourteenth-century mosaics of Sicily and Constantinople, the eleventh-century frescoes at S. Clemente, the mosaics and frescoes of Cavallini, and the Rucellai Madonna (now restored to Cimabue) are as beautiful as even the finest of later work. Is no credit to be given to Christianity for the architecture, sculpture, and painting, and the music also, which it inspired—not to mention a hundred exquisite minor arts which it developed also in its own way? Beautiful though art has been all over the world—for God has never left himself without witness—there is no parallel to the painting of Christendom except in the exquisite but comparatively limited art of China; little to its sculpture outside the Greece of a short period; little among all the beautiful buildings of the world to the breadth and richness, the content, of its architecture; and no parallel of any kind to its music.

Let anyone alter this statement according to any personal predilections of his own—let him, for instance, prefer the trabeated architecture of Greece, with its childlike perfection in limitation, to Durham or Amiens—let him worship the Venus of Melos, or detest all painting before Whistler, let him be ignorant of all poetry from Dante to Tennyson—the fact would still remain that to accuse Christianity of being inimical to art is in the last degree absurd, because Christendom has produced the greatest volume of the greatest art in human history.

The Modern Period

We have discarded the word Renaissance (except as a convenient though ill-founded architectural term, like Gothic) because it is unscientific in principle, untrue in fact, and the main cause of our mistakes when we theorize about art. The fact that the Mediæval system broke up remains

of course unchallenged: it was already rocking in those centuries which are commonly regarded as peculiarly mediæval, the thirteenth and fourteenth, so that if the current use of the term were defensible we should have to include Gothic architecture in the Renaissance. The rise of the guilds and free cities, the disintegration of feudalism and degeneration of monasticism, the growth of criticism, the Humanist development, and the New Learning, the final submergence of Byzantine civilization, the birth of natural science, the revolt of Protestantism, the forming of new centralized states, and the discovery of the New World, all were stages in the transition from Mediæval to Modern conditions. In fact, as soon as Western Europe settled down in the eleventh century, it began to move forward in a changed direction, increasing in momentum till the crisis of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Every stage is illustrated in art, and it would be easy to reproduce the whole story in a series of photographs. Art indeed has its own history, but it illustrates also the whole history of the world, both the spiritual and material, because the spiritual cannot be separated from the material; and art is enormously affected by the political and religious conditions of the people. The weighty civilization of ancient Egypt produced one form of art; the brilliant lucidity of the Greeks another: both were inspired by their religion, both were limited by slavery. Not less characteristic is the overloaded art of Hindu pantheism and caste, or the reforming grace which spread into India from Persia, or the unstable emotionalism of the Arabs and Turks—if the Turks can be said to have any art of their own at all. We might continue: but for our purpose here it is sufficient to point out that the Intellectual Revolution which culminated in the sixteenth century deeply affected art in at least three different ways:—

1. By freeing it from ecclesiastical influences, and thus

indefinitely extending its scope. This resulted sometimes in neo-paganism—in the pomps of much sixteenth-century art, or the vanities of the wig-and-patches period; but it also produced intensely religious painting, like that of Tintoret at one extreme and Rembrandt at the other. The old ecclesiastical influence had narrowed Christianity down to a much smaller thing than the religion of Christ, and the adequate expression of Christianity by the arts will probably come about in an era that we have not yet reached. It has been said indeed [1] with some truth that religious painting came to an end after the seventeeth century, and that artists thereupon, being without a subject that could adequately inspire them, took to landscape painting. There has of course been an enormous number of religious pictures since; but it is probably true that a great development of real religious art lies before us in the future.

2. The Intellectual Revolution affected art adversely by drawing men's minds to other forms of activity in exploration and commerce, in invention and manufacture, in politics, literature, philosophy, and above all in the ever-increasing forms of science. Born scientists in fifteenth-century Florence, like Uccello or Leonardo, had to become artists, because there was no other adequate means of expression: at the present day a large number of born artists become merchants, engineers, or scientists, because the demand for such services is much less precarious than the demand for art: it requires, for instance, a man of almost saintly qualities to throw up a career as electrician, manufacturer, or stockbroker, in order that he may devote his life to making beautiful furniture for a society that spends its money on antiques. Even within the realm of art itself, the old dominant arts have been weakened by the enormous rivalry since the sixteenth century of the drama and of music.

[1] *E.g.* by Professor della Seta, *Religione e arte figurata.*

There should be nothing disconcerting in all this. Man cannot advance both feet at once; and even the tragic litter of the nineteenth century should not blind us to what it achieved in poetry, in science, and in moral progress. The worst horrors are over; art is recovering already, and Philistinism is ceasing to be a characteristic of the educated classes.

3. The Intellectual Revolution wounded art in a deeper way: by its pedantries and its policies it made art an appanage of the rich, and it made people think of art as "a sort of luxurious fringe of life," which the *Encyclopædia Britannica* says that it is. That art has been gradually drained out of the life of the people, and has ceased to be vernacular, is an undoubted fact, however we may account for it. Socialists, guildsmen, mediævalists, Catholics, machinery-haters, draw different veins of inspiration from the past, and not without some elements of reason; though they generally manufacture their own history, and sometimes forget that we cannot resuscitate the past. Certainly art had once been a common enthusiasm; certainly the ordinary village masons and carpenters of the later Middle Ages were able to produce, and seldom failed to produce, works of art that are at once our inspiration and our despair. The change must be largely due to social and political causes, and it is not confined to countries that accepted the Reformation. The Church had once been more the Church of the people; in all countries she passed more under royal and aristocratic influence. Her buildings had been great centres of art for rich and poor alike—not mere picture-galleries or museums, but centres of a living drama which was, in Professor Letheby's words: "the ceremonial life of a people"; they ceased to be this, in Catholic as well as in Protestant countries, though, of course, with a difference, and art passed into the houses of princes and of merchant princes. The causes lay further

back than the ecclesiastical controversies; they lay in the intellectual unheaval which affected religion and politics and the whole order of society: as a result of the new knowledge, the quickened intellectual activity, the discoveries and inventions, rich men became more powerful, and poor men lost something which they had formerly possessed. Leaving controversial matters on one side, we can assert that at least they lost their art, both the understanding of beauty and the power of creating it. The very advances in the technique of painting contributed to this; and still more did the learned antiquarianism of Renaissance architecture (and of the Gothic "revival" also) remove art from the common people, and prevent the initiation of the humble craftsman.

Now art cannot greatly flourish unless it is rooted in the life of the people and stimulated by a general demand. A few men of genius will struggle to the top; but art in general will decline, when it becomes the plaything of a small class, and will suffer most in its fundamental forms, in architecture, and in furniture and costume, which are the arts of common life. Such has been the history of the last three centuries, reaching its nadir perhaps, in the year of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Religion and art had suffered together, because together they became separated from the common life of the people; and Europe passed into the age from which we now seem to be slowly emerging, an age (on its bad side) of civilized barbarism, of narrow materialism, expressing itself in dingy sentimentality and flashy shams, an age during which the good word "vulgar" acquired a new meaning.

By contrast with this, the religion of the preceding Christian centuries had been the consistent comrade of art, its upholder and inspirer, with triumphant results; and the life of that art was so strong that it was able to survive both the age of the dilettante and the Industrial Revolution. The

very art of painting in its vigorous survival, as we know it to-day, was perfected in the later Middle Ages, and its great masters in that culmination which is called the Renaissance were the children of the Middle Ages, and the inheritors of a tradition which stretched back to the mosaics of Constantine and Justinian and beyond. Those were not more the ages of faith than our own, nor was art then or at any time the meek handmaid of religion; but Christianity had given common men a new sense of values, and of their own value; and they expressed themselves all over Europe, from Byzantium to Britain, in a great art that was distinctively Christian, not so much because it was largely concerned with those popular homes which we call churches, as because, for the first time in history, it was the art of a whole people.

It was this very belief in the eternal value of the individual soul, undeniably a Christian belief, which, as it slowly matured, created the Humanist reaction against ecclesiastical restrictions. In Humanism men at least realized themselves fully as individuals. They broke away—and with the spread of education ever increasing numbers, in Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant countries alike, continue to break away—from ecclesiastical domination, nor will they ever return. The Churches first taught them to realize themselves as individuals, and the Churches will have to learn what they taught. Meanwhile there is chaos. The settlement has not yet come: and the effect of the struggle upon art has been to stimulate the painter as an individual, but to weaken the æsthetic sense in the general population, and almost to destroy the arts of common life.

General Characteristics

This Christian art has some characteristics which most people recognize, the free and exuberant variety of its orna-

ment, for instance, its naturalism, inventiveness, delicacy, romance, its aspiring intellect, and genius for progress and invention. The art of Christendom indeed teems with beautiful inventions, like interior space composition in architecture, or the great spandrelled dome, or the spire, or stained glass, or oil-painting as we have it. Every one of its styles of architecture is a marvel of originality; and they owe their very existence to the new religion which first admitted the slave into fellowship and then knocked off his fetters.

So far from Christianity having made art harsh or emaciated, it introduced both tenderness and laughter. It made the very stones to chuckle, and if its great cathedrals seem the embodiment of prayer, they are also like homes where the laughter of children is never far away. In its statuary and painting there is a depth of humanity which the pagan art of Europe had not known; and smiling figures are so rarely found elsewhere that the smile may be included among the characteristics of Christian art, as well as the ability to portray every phase of noble thought and emotion. From this intimate study of the soul of man came all the developments of portrait painting. And was there not also a discovery of the soul of Nature, such as the modern poets have expressed, which built up the later art of landscape? Only in the entirely separate art of China is there any parallel to these characteristics: and China also, as we have said, had a religious principle in its art.

We do not know much about the use of colour among the ancients, except that it was simple and gay. White cities, with here and there a gleam of gold, a bar of red, and a splash of blue—the columns sometimes coloured yellow, as in the Parthenon, to soften the glare of the sun on the white marble—a population draped beautifully in predominant white—such is the general impression we receive. Pompeii shows no signs of development. The invention of colour

in Europe as a great æsthetic instrument seems not to be earlier than Byzantine art, and to have achieved its first unqualified success in the mosaics. Since then, colour has become like a new kind of music, a new means of human speech, which we have now in assured possession.

In making such estimates as these, one is in constant danger of seeming to belittle the work of men's hands in earlier ages or under other civilizations. It is not to disparage their noble beauty that I put forward these suggestions, but to show that in Christendom something has been added to art—something indescribably precious. An enhanced skill and science indeed, an extended field of expression, and many inventions, but also a transcendental power—the sense that a man's reach must exceed his grasp, and that all beauty has an eternal meaning; and besides this, a love of natural and human things, not a mere selection of types, as in classical art, but an understanding of ordinary people—of publicans and sinners, of the lilies, and the grass, and the sparrows, which seems to be the mind of Christ himself. Christianity has enlarged both the divine and the human content of art, and has led men—

> "To a land of love and peace,
> Of beauty unknown.
> The world that earth-born man,
> By evil undismay'd,
> Out of the breath of God
> Hath for his heaven made.
>
> Where all his dreams soe'er
> Of holy things and fair
> In splendour are upgrown,
> Which thro' the toilsome years
> Martyrs and faithful seers
> And poets with holy tears
> Of hope have sown."[1]

[1] Robert Bridges, *A Song of Darkness and Light.*

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